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SUBJECT: TFH01: HONDURAS COUP: SANTOS SUPPORTS SAN JOSE
ACCORD

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 617

¶1. (U) Summary: In an August 5 national television interview, Liberal Party presidential nominee Elvin Santos expressed his support for the San Jose Accord, called for the conditional return of President Zelaya, and stated that he had no personal involvement in the events of June 28. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Liberal Party presidential nominee Elvin Santos was interviewed on Honduras' morning talk show "Face to Face" for 90 minutes on August 5. Renato Alvarez conducted the interview, which covered a variety of topics.

¶3. (U) San Jose Accord: Santos clearly stated, "I support the Arias Plan." At the same time, he expressed "strong doubts" that it would come to fruition in the "coming hours."

¶4. (U) Return of Zelaya: Santos said that he believes Zelaya should return as long as the return did not threaten Honduran sovereignty or its political system. He cited several statements by Chavez, Ortega, and Correa, which he said suggested threats to Honduras.

¶5. (U) Accountability: Santos noted that Honduras will be difficult to govern if Zelaya returns, given current political polarization. He said that there will have to be mechanisms that guarantee accountability, including the imposition of an overseeing authority that could enforce the agreements and remove Zelaya if he violates the agreement.

¶6. (U) June 28 events: Santos stated that he was not involved in the events of June 28. He said that the events did not qualify as a military coup, noting that the U.S. Department of State had not classified the event as a coup. He stated that "violations" occurred, such as the forced exile of President Zelaya. He said that President Zelaya should have been allowed to defend himself within the country, though noting the military's claim that the removal took place due to a "state of necessity."

¶7. (U) Path Forward: Santos said that he did not agree with the path Zelaya was on before June 28, and that Zelaya had broken the law. Santos expressed his belief that there should be a "consultation" with the Honduran people on the future of the country, but that it had to be held within a legal framework. He said that it was important for the Liberal Party to now unite around a new generation of political leaders who can gain the trust of the international community.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Santos, who is now trailing Nationalist Party candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo in the polls (reftel), was careful not to take any positions that would offend the military or hurt his standing within the various elements of the Liberal Party. At the same time, he attempted to distance himself personally from the events of June 28, knowing that the perception that in some way he was involved in the coup or acquiescent of it will hurt him with Zelaya faction Liberals. From Santos's perspective, the sooner he and the Honduran people can focus on November 29 instead of June 28, the better. End Comment.

LLORENS